

## *Cryptantha gracilis* Osterhout

narrow-stem cryptantha

Boraginaceae (Borage Family)

**Status:** State Sensitive

**Rank:** G5S2

**General Description:** Adapted from Cronquist et al. (1984): *Cryptantha gracilis* is a 4 to 12 in. (10-30 cm) tall annual. The stem is single or branched, and covered with coarse, stiff, unequal hairs. The leaves are scattered along the stem, linear or nearly so, and blunt-tipped. They are mostly  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $1\frac{1}{2}$  in. (1-3.5 cm) long,  $\frac{1}{16}$  to  $\frac{1}{8}$  in. (1-4 mm) wide, and covered with spreading hairs; the hairs on the lower surface, at least, are evidently blistered at the base. The flowering spikes are coiled and compact, only  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  in. (0.5-2 cm) long, and never become elongate. The calyx is nearly directly attached to the stem,  $\frac{1}{16}$  to  $\frac{1}{8}$  in. (2-3 mm) long, and covered with long, white, soft, ascending, straight or nearly straight hairs that often intermingle with bristly hairs. The inconspicuous corolla is white and  $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (1-2 mm) wide. The nutlets are solitary (or occasionally 2 or 3), smooth, lanceolate, and tend to have a raised line along the margin.

**Identification Tips:** There are a number of small white-flowered annual cryptanthas in the range of *Cryptantha gracilis*. The most obvious features of *C. gracilis* are the combination of its tightly coiled inflorescence that does not elongate much as the fruits develop, and its usually solitary nutlets. It may be mistaken for another annual with solitary nutlets, *C. flaccida*, but can be distinguished by the following characters. *C. gracilis* is covered with spreading hairs, whereas *C. flaccida* is covered with appressed hairs. The nutlets of *C. gracilis* have a raised line along the margins, whereas the nutlets of *C. flaccida* do not have a raised line along the margins. A technical key is recommended for identification.

**Phenology:** Throughout its range this species is identifiable from April through July. In Washington it was observed flowering and fruiting from May to June.

**Range:** This species is distributed from Washington to California and east to Wyoming, Colorado and New Mexico. In Washington it is known from Douglas and Grant counties.

**Habitat:** In Washington this species has been found in talus and pockets of silt, from 1250 to 2680 feet (381-816 m) elevation.

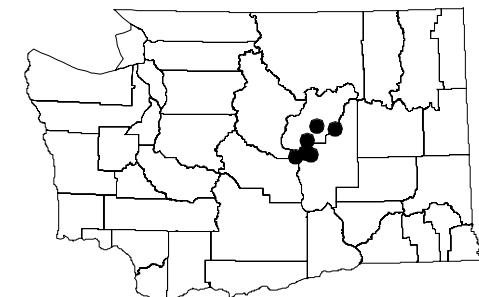
## *Cryptantha gracilis* Osterhout

narrow-stem cryptantha



©1984 by The New York Botanical Garden. Illustration by Bobbi Angell

Known distribution  
of *Cryptantha gracilis*  
in Washington



- Current (1980+)
- Historic (older than 1980)

**Cryptantha gracilis** Osterhout

narrow-stem cryptantha

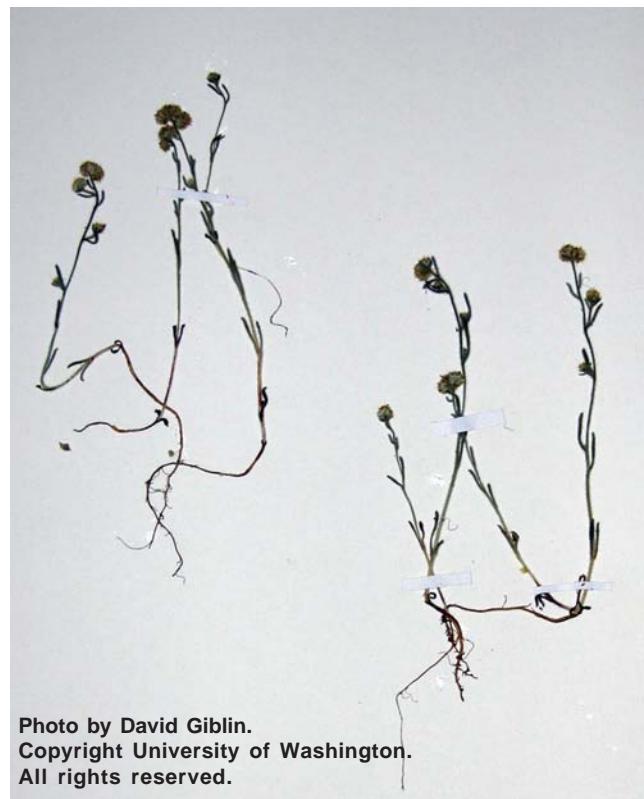


Photo by David Giblin.  
Copyright University of Washington.  
All rights reserved.

**Cryptantha gracilis** Osterhout

narrow-stem cryptantha

Associated species include: big sagebrush (*Artemesia tridentata*), cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), Lewis mock-orange (*Philadelphus lewisii*), Carey's balsamroot (*Balsamorhiza careyana*), rabbit brush (*Chrysothamnus nauseosus*), and serviceberry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*).

**Ecology:** This species seems to require steep, somewhat unstable, open substrates.

**State Status Comments:** In Washington this species is known from less than ten occurrences. Because this species was recently added to the Washington rare plant list, not much is known about the degree of its rarity in the state at this time.

**Inventory Needs:** Because this species is an annual, exact population numbers and locations are likely to vary from year to year. Known occurrences should be revisited for updated information. Talus slopes and silty ephemeral drainages in Douglas and Grant counties should be systematically surveyed for additional populations.

**Threats and Management Concerns:** Threats to this species include grazing, ORV use, development, and possible competition with exotic plants.

**Comments:** This species is not listed in Hitchcock et al. (1959). For a technical key, refer to Cronquist et al. (1984).

**References:**

Cronquist et al. 1984. *Intermountain Flora Volume 4: subclass Asteridae (except Asteraceae)*. The New York Botanical Garden, Bronx, New York. 573 pp.

Hitchcock, C.L., A. Cronquist, M. Ownbey, J.W. Thompson. 1959. *Vascular Plants of the Pacific Northwest Part 4: Ericaceae Through Campanulaceae*. University of Washington Press, Seattle, WA. 510 pp.